

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3244

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

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AMCONSUL BOMBAY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: AICC SESSION REVIEW

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: THE DEC. 28 - JAN. 2 AICC SESSION NEAR CHANDIGARH UNDERScoreD MRS. GANDHI'S OVERRIDING POLITICAL POSITION AND ENHANCED AUTHORITARIANISM IN INDIA. THERE WAS NO DISSENT. FOR THE FIRST TIME, NO AMENDMENTS WERE EVEN CONSIDERED TO THE RESOLUTIONS THAT WERE DRAWN UP BY THE CWC DRAFTING COMMITTEE OF WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER WAS A MEMBER. SECURITY WAS INTENSE, INDEED UNPRECEDENTED COMPARED TO PREVIOUS SIMILAR PARTY GATHERINGS. ALMOST ALL OF THE SPEAKERS SELECTED WERE MRS. GANDHI'S PERSONAL LOYALISTS. THEY DEVOTED MAJOR EMPHASIS TO LAUDING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR SAVING THE NATION FROM CHAOS AND INSTABILITY. CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROOAH COMPARED HER TO ASHOKA AND MAHATMA GANDHI, AS ONE WHO HAD RISEN TO DEFEND THE NATION DURING A PERIOD OF DIRE NEED. IN GENERAL,

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THE SPEECHES DURING THE SESSION LARGELY REVOLVED AROUND

RATIONALIZING THE EMERGENCY AND THE NEED TO RETAIN ITS RESTRICTIONS TO GUARANTEE THE NATION'S UNITY, STABILITY AND PROGRESS. MRS. GANDHI IN SEVERAL EMOTIONAL SPEECHES CHARGED THAT EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CONSPIRACIES AIMED AT UNDERMINING INDIA'S UNITY WERE STILL AT WORK. MOST OTHER SPEAKERS EXPANDED ON THIS CENTRAL THEME. (ONE MP, WHEN ASKED BY EMBOFF WHY HE DID NOT SPEAK, JOKED THAT HE DESIRED TO SPARE THE LATTER THE DISCOMFITURE OF ANOTHER ANTI-CIA TIRADE.) THE SESSION CONFIRMED THE POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS; CONTINUATION OF THE EMERGENCY; THE INEVITABILITY OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES; AND THE SHRINKING PROFILE OF OLDER CONGRESS LEADERS SUCH AS J.J. RAM AND THE RISING PROMINENCE OF SANJAY GANDHI. DESPITE THE RHETORIC, IT FAILED TO PRODUCE ANY REAL INDICATIONS THAT THE CONGRESS PARTY ORGANIZATION WILL BE REMODED INTO AN EFFECTIVE FORCE, ALTHOUGH SANJAY GANDHI'S PRESENT EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE THE YOUTH CONGRESS COULD BEAR FRUIT. END INTRODUCTION/SUMMARY.

1. INTERNATIONAL: THE MOST NOTABLE ASPECT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S EXTENSIVE ALLEGATIONS ABOUT "EXTERNAL DANGERS" WAS HER EMPHASIS ON THEIR CURRENT AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE WITH RESPECT TO INDIA'S "DEMOCRACY," SOVEREIGNTY AND UNITY. SHE SPOKE WITH GREAT EMOTION AND FORCE DURING HER ADDRESSES ON DEC. 30 AND 31, HER VOICE ALTERNATELY RISING AND FALLING. ALTHOUGH SHE SPECIFICALLY NAMED NO COUNTRIES, IT WAS CLEAR SHE WAS REFERRING TO THE UNITED STATES, PAKISTAN, CHINA AND THE BRICH NATIONS" OF THE WORLD AS SPONSORS OF THESE "EXTERNAL DANGERS." SHE DIRECTLY IDENTIFIED THE FOREIGN PRESS, THE DMK GOVERNMENT IN TAMIL NADU, THE JANATA FRONT GOVERNMENT IN GUJARAT, THE RSS (WHICH SHE OPENLY ACCUSED OF INDULGING IN SABOTAGE), AND THE INTERNAL SUBVERSIVE FORCES IN GENERAL. ALMOST ALL OTHER SPEAKERS PICKED UP THE TREND OF HER REMARKS. NO OTHER SPEAKER SURPASSED HER FORCEFULNESS. DURING THE LAST TWO DAYS OF THE SESSION, MEMBERS OF THE PRO-CPI LOBBY IN CONGRESS DISTRIBUTED LITERATURE AMONG CONFEREES. ONE WIDELY CIRCULATED PAMPHLET (POUCHED TO NEA/INS) DEALT WITH ALLEGED CIA OPERATIONS IN INDIA AND ABROAD.

2. POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, CONTINUATION OF THE EMERGENCY AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES: CONFIRMATION OF THESE THREE DECISIONS WERE ANNOUNCED AT THE SESSION. IN RATIONALIZING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, THE PRIME MINISTER DECLARED THAT "THE UNITY AND STRENGTH OF THE COUNTRY," THE "FULFILLMENT OF OUR PROGRAMS," AND THE NEED TO LAY A "STRONG FOUNDATION" FOR THE COUNTRY WERE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ELECTIONS. SHE CLAIMED THAT REPORTS FROM THE STATES ABOUT THIS YEAR'S GOOD CROP AND THE HEALTHY IMPACT OF THE EMERGENCY LEFT NO QUESTION THAT CONGRESS WOULD WIN "HANDS DOWN" IF ELECTIONS WERE HELD IN FEBRUARY AS SCHEDULED.

3. ALTHOUGH THE CONSTITUTION STIPULATES THAT AN EMERGENCY WILL CONTINUE UNTIL UNILATERALLY REVOKED BY THE PRESIDENT, CONGRESS LEADERS AT THE AICC SESSION NEVERTHELESS TOOK THE OCCASION TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE EMERGENCY WOULD CONTINUE. MRS. GANDHI IN SEPARATE COMMENTS ON THE EMERGENCY STATED THAT THE ON-GOING EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DANGERS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES NOW AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT ECONOMIC PROGRAMS NECESSITATED CONTINUING THE EMERGENCY. IN ONE SPEECH SHE SAID THE EMERGENCY COULD NOT BE REVOKED AS LONG AS THE COUNTRY FACED DANGER FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT, ADDING THAT THE "EMERGENCY WAS NOT ENFORCED TO SAVE MRS. GANDHI. ITS IMPOSITION WAS NOT A PLAY. IT WAS PROCLAIMED TO SAVE THE COUNTRY." WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER RAY STATED "WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, THE EMERGENCY HAS TO CONTINUE TILL THE SITUATION IS CONTAINED. MRS. GANDHI COULD BE TRUSTED NOT TO KEEP IT A MOMENT LONGER THAN WAS NECESSARY." CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROAH ANNOUNCED THAT SINCE THERE HAD BEEN NO "SEA CHANGE" JUSTIFYING LIFTING OF THE EMERGENCY, IT "WOULD CONTINUE SO LONG AS IT THOUGHT NECESSARY BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CONGRESS PARTY."

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4. THE MAIN SPEAKERS AT THE SESSION, INCLUDING MRS. GANDHI, CALLED FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE IMPERATIVES OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS AND THE SUPREMACY OF PARLIAMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER AND SEVERAL OTHERS CALLED FOR A WIDE RANGING DISCUSSION AMONG "NON-EXPERTS", (SHE INCLUDED CONGRESSMEN AS WELL AS LAWYERS), BEFORE INITIATING MAJOR CHANGES. ON ONE OCCASION SHE REMARKED, "WE HAVE BEEN SAYING THAT WE DO NOT WANT TO BREAK DOWN THE EDIFICE BUT TO CHANGE IT. I WOULD NOT SUPPORT SUCH A VILENT MOVE AS TO COMPLETELY CHANGE THE EDIFICE." (COMMENT: THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENTS INDICATE THERE MAY AT LEAST BE SOME DELAY BEFORE MAJOR CHANGES ARE MADE; HOWEVER, GIVEN PRESS AND POLITICAL RESTRICTIONS, IT IS CERTAIN THAT ANY PUBLIC "DISCUSSION" WILL BE CLOSELY CONTROLLED.)

5. PERSONALITIES: THE CENTERPIECES FOR THE SESSION WERE CLEARLY MRS. GANDHI AND HER SON, SANJAY. THE CONGRESS
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PRESIDENT COMPARED THE PRIME MINISTER TO ASHOKA AND MAHATMA GANDHI AS ONE OF A STRING OF LEADERS IN INDIAN HISTORY WHO HAVE RISEN WHEN SUBSTANTIAL CHALLENGES FACED THE NATION. SLOGANS ON PLACARDS SCATTERED NEAR THE SESSION HALL HERALDED SANJAY AS WELL AS MRS. GANDHI. EMBOFF OVERHEARD GROUPS OF CONGRESSMEN MARCHING NEAR THE HALL CHANTING "LONG LIVE INDIRA GANDHI, LONG LIVE SANJAY GANDHI." MANY LEADING MP'S AND OTHERS ABANDONED THE CONFERENCE HALL ON DECEMBER 28 TO HEAR SANJAY GIVE A SPEECH TO A YOUTH CONGRESS MEETING IN CHANDIGARH. ONCE POWERFUL POLITICIANS JAGJIVAN RAM AND Y.B. CHAVAN WERE RELATIVELY ISOLATED DURING THE SESSION. FEW SPOKE TO THEM. SENIOR PARTY MEMBERS, INCLUDING SOME CHIEF MINISTERS AND UNION MINISTERS, CROWDED AROUND SANJAY WHO STOOD NEAR THE REAR OF THE SEATS EXTENDING BACK FROM THE SPEAKERS PODIUM. (SEPTEL ON SANJAY'S ROLE AT THE CHANDIGARH AICC SESSION FOLLOWS.)

6. CONGRESS PARTY: THE SESSION WITNESSED THE USUAL EXHORTATIONS FROM CONGRESS LEADERS FOR THE PARTY RANK AND FILE TO "GO TO THE PEOPLE." IN HER JAN. 1 SPEECH ON PARTY MATTERS, MRS. GANDHI REPEATED CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROOAH'S ASSERTION IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS THAT 1976 WILL BE "THE YEAR OF ORGANIZATION" FOR THE PARTY. SHE CALLED FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF CONGRESS ORGANIZATION WORK AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL, AND UNDERSCORED THE NEED TO MOBILIZE PEASANT WOMEN AND YOUTH IN SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS. IN HIS REMARKS CONCLUDING THE SESSION, BAROOAH SAID THAT THE "COWARDLY" AND DISLOYAL CONGRESS PARTY ELEMENTS WHICH HAD SAT ON THE FENCE WHILE OPPOSITION

PRESSURE MOUNTED ON THE PRIME MINISTER EARLIER IN 1975
WOULD BE "WEEDED OUT."

7. COMMENT: DESPITE THE RHETORIC, THE SESSION GAVE NO TANGIBLE
INDICATIONS THAT THE CONGRESS PARTY WILL INDEED BE "REVITALIZED."
NO ORGANIZATION ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN HELD FOR THE AICC OF
STATE PCCS SINCE MRS. GANDHI TOOK OVER ALMOST TEN YEARS
AGO. THEY WERE AGAIN POSTPONED DURING THIS SESSION. DELEGATES
APPLAUDED THE CHEST-THUMPING, WINDY SPEECHES DELIVERED AT
THE ROSTRUM, BUT ENTHUSIASM WAS LACKING. MANY DELEGATES
DRIFTED HOME AFTER THE TWO DAYS OF "CLOSED" SESSIONS AND
BEFORE THE PLENARY. THEY WILL IN ALL PROBABILITY RETURN TO
THEIR LOCAL AREAS AND WAIT FOR UNEXPECTED INITIATIVES FROM
ABOVE, AS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST. THE ONLY ORGANIZATION THAT
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SEEMS TO HOLD AT LEAST SOME POTENTIAL FOR STOKING ACTION
AT THE LOWER LEVELS IS THE YOUTH CONGRESS UNDER SANJAY GANDHI.
OTHERWISE, MRS. GANDHI WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK TO THE BUREAU-
CRACY, INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AND THE POLICE ASSETS--NOT THE
PARTY ORGANIZATION--TO CARRY OUT HER WISHES.
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